A Study on the Impact of Social Media on Consumers Behaviour in the Tourism Industry

SHORT SYNOPSIS

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that the short synopsis "**A Study on Impact of Social Media on Consumer Behaviour in Tourism Industry**" being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in under School of Leadership and Management of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad during the Academic Year 2021-2022. It is a bonafide record of original work carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Amandeep Dhaliwal** and has not been submitted in full or part to any other university or institute for degree or diploma. Further, it is certified that short synopsis is plagiarism free, and proof has been submitted.

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Abstract

Since 1945, the tourism sector in India has experienced remarkable growth and evolution, marked by consistent advancement and broadening horizons. Today, amidst a global opening to travel, the landscape witnesses a notable shift towards mobile-based bookings, personalized travel packages, experiential tourism, extended travel durations, and the increasing influence of social channels. This research delves into the evolving dynamics of tourism in India, particularly focusing on how social channels impact consumer behavior. Social media has risen as a potent force shaping consumer behavior across diverse sectors, including tourism. Its extensive acceptance extends across national boundaries, shaping opinions and influencing decision-making. This study aims to explore the significant impact of social media on consumer behavior in the Indian tourism industry. By analyzing various factors and their interconnections, this research seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how social media shapes tourists' choices and preferences in India. It endeavors to dissect the intricate relationships between Social Media Promotions, Social Media Channels, Social Media Information Search, Behavioural Intention, and Use Behaviour in the tourism industry. Through empirical analysis, the study seeks to provide insights into how social media factors, including gender, shape the use behaviour of tourist destinations, impact travel preferences, and ultimately influence consumer choices.

Thus, the study would provide valuable insights for industry stakeholders and policymakers, helping them to adapt social media strategies to enhance the overall tourism experience.

Keywords: *Behavioral Intention, Consumer Behavior, Social Media, Tourism, Tourism Industry*

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1. Description of Broad Area

The study of social media's impact on consumer behavior in the tourism industry belongs to the broader field of digital marketing and consumer attitudes. This research domain explores how social media platforms influence the decision-making processes, preferences, and behaviors of consumers when planning and engaging in travel-related activities. Social media's role in shaping perceptions through user-generated content, online reviews, and influencer endorsements significantly affects how consumers choose destinations, accommodations, and experiences (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Additionally, the interactive nature of social media facilitates real-time engagement and feedback, further enhancing consumer trust and loyalty (Leung, Law, Van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013). By understanding these dynamics, the study aims to provide insights into effective marketing strategies that can leverage social media to enhance consumer engagement and drive growth in the tourism sector.

1.1. Background of the study

In recent years, the role of social channels in influencing consumer behaviour within the tourism industry has become the subject of extensive study and analysis. Researchers have delved into the profound impact that social platforms have on travelers' decision-making processes, perceptions of destinations, and the overall tourism experience.

Numerous studies have highlighted the increasing significance of social media platforms in shaping travel-related decisions. The interconnectedness of individuals through platforms like "Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter" has created a dynamic environment where users share their travel experiences, recommendations, and reviews (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2008).

Furthermore, research by Xiang and Gretzel (2010) emphasized the significant impact of user-generated content on social media in shaping the decisions of prospective travellers. They found that peer-to-peer communication through platforms significantly shapes perceptions and choices related to tourism destinations. This phenomenon has a substantial impact on consumer behaviour, as travellers often rely on these shared experiences and opinions when planning their trips.

Additionally, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) underscored the profound influence of social media on revolutionizing the tourism sector. They emphasized how these platforms not only enable the spread of information but also encourage interaction and collaborative

creation of travel experiences, shaping consumer decision-making processes.

The evolving nature of social media platforms and their integration into daily life have led scholars like (Leung et al., 2013) to explore the multifaceted relationship between social media and tourism. Their research highlighted how social media influences destination choices, serves as a platform for seeking travel-related information, facilitates sharing experiences, and impacts the overall consumer decision-making process.

Overall, existing research underscores the substantial impact of social media on consumer behavior in the tourism industry. These studies collectively highlight the pervasive influence of social platforms in shaping travelers' perceptions, preferences, and decisions, establishing social media as a crucial factor in modern tourism dynamics. In today's tourism landscape, social media platforms have become essential tools that influence consumer behavior, decision-making processes, and destination choices among travelers (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Despite recognizing the undeniable influence of social media on shaping perceptions and preferences, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced mechanisms and dynamics through which these platforms mold tourists' behaviors. Furthermore, the rapid evolution and diversification of social media platforms, alongside their integration into the fabric of everyday life, necessitate a comprehensive investigation into their ever-changing role in influencing travelers' decisions.

This study intends to explore the complex impact of social media on consumer behaviour within the tourism sector, seeking to explore the specific ways in which these platforms impact travel-related decision-making, information acquisition, destination preferences, and the overall tourism experience. By addressing these gaps, this research endeavors to provide an analysis of the complex connection between social media and consumer behaviour, thereby contributing to a deeper comprehension of the evolving dynamics that shape contemporary travel choices and experiences.

2. Literature Review

Social media has significantly transformed consumer behavior in the travel industry. It has revolutionized how people interact with travel-related information and make decisions about their travel experiences (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). A burgeoning body of literature underscores the profound influence of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and TripAdvisor on tourists' choices and preferences. Scholars argue that social media serves as a virtual marketplace where users actively seek, share, and contribute to the collective narrative of destinations. As consumers increasingly rely on user-generated content, reviews, and recommendations, understanding the complex relationship between social media and consumer behavior becomes crucial for stakeholders in the tourism sector (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2018).

This review delves into essential aspects of this connection, investigating how social media influences decision-making, aids in information gathering, molds destination perceptions, and encourages user participation in the constantly changing terrain of the tourism sector (Larsen, 2013). It aims to synthesize key insights into the dynamic interplay between social media and consumer behaviour, shedding light on pivotal aspects that shape the contemporary travel experience (Fotis, 2015). Some of the key aspects identified include:

(a) Influence on Decision-Making

Scholars argue that social media platforms act as influential channels that significantly shape tourists' decision-making processes (Litvin et al., 2018). The ability of users to share personal experiences, recommendations, and reviews on these platforms contributes to a collective digital narrative that plays a pivotal role in influencing destination choices.

(b) Information Acquisition and Sharing

Social media serves as a dynamic information hub during the pre-trip planning phase, providing users with user-generated content, real-time updates, and visually immersive experiences (Sigala, 2018). The literature suggests that consumers actively seek and share information, fostering a collaborative knowledge exchange that significantly impacts their understanding of potential destinations.

(c) Destination Image and Perception

The portrayal of destinations on social media platforms plays a critical role in shaping destination image and perception (Hays et al., 2019). Positive user-generated content and influencer endorsements enhance destinations' attractiveness, while negative reviews may pose challenges. Understanding how social media influences the formation of destination images are crucial for effective destination marketing.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) offers a valuable framework for examining the influence of social media on consumer behaviour within the tourism industry (Rizky et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022). This model, an expansion of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), acknowledges situations where individuals might lack absolute control over their actions.

According to TPB, firstly, individuals form behavioural beliefs and evaluations based on the content they encounter on social media platforms (Wang et al., 2022). Exposure to various travel-related information and experiences and their attitudes toward specific destinations, accommodations, or activities. Secondly, social media platforms act as channels for normative beliefs by presenting expectations through influencers, user reviews, and community discussions. These perceptions of what others deem preferable or enjoyable significantly influence individuals' inclinations and decisions regarding their travel choices (Rizky et al., 2017). Lastly, social media also provides information that influences control beliefs. Individuals gather insights into available resources, opportunities, and potential obstacles related to their travel plans. This information affects their perceived control over decision-making, impacting their confidence and ability to engage in certain travel behaviour.

Therefore, within the tourism industry's context, this study utilizes the Theory of Planned Behaviour to explore how social media content influences individuals' beliefs about travel outcomes, shapes subjective norms regarding travel choices, and impacts perceived control over decision-making processes, particularly within the Indian tourism landscape.

2.1 Identification of Factors

2.1.1 Social Media Tourism Promotion

In the contemporary tourism industry, social media's transformative influence on destination promotion has become an undeniable force. Channels such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have revolutionized the way destinations are marketed,

providing a dynamic space for engagement, information dissemination, and community building. The burgeoning realm of social media tourism promotion presents the ways in which these platforms have redefined destination marketing, reshaped user engagement, and fundamentally altered the fabric of the travel experience.

The ubiquity of social media (SM) has fundamentally changed the dynamic forces of destination promotion, moving beyond traditional advertising to embrace immersive storytelling that leverages the visual allure of destinations. As Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2018) suggest, social media platforms offer a medium where destinations can showcase their unique attributes, captivating a global audience through visually appealing and compelling narratives.

Moreover, social media facilitates direct and real-time engagement between destinations and travellers, dismantling traditional communication barriers. Users actively participate in shaping destination narratives through comments, shares, and likes, contributing to a collaborative and dynamic digital story.

While social media presents unprecedented opportunities for tourism promotion, it also brings forth a set of challenges. Hays (2013) highlight concerns such as information overload, authenticity issues, and the need for effective management of user-generated content. Navigating these challenges requires a strategic understanding of the digital landscape and an adaptive approach to leveraging the potential of social media (SM) for destination marketing.

Promotion through social media introduces a dynamic interplay among technology, user engagement, and the ever-changing landscape of travel experiences (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020). Social media has continuously impacted travelers decision-making and the actual behavior, notably in destination choices, itinerary planning, and consumption of tourism offerings (Buhalis & Law 2008; Filieri et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2018).

Thus, based on the key theme that social media-based promotional strategies of destinations impact and redefine the way travellers engage with and perceive the world, based on these insights, the following hypotheses are outlined:

H1: Social Media Tourism Promotion significantly influences the tourist's behavioural intention.

2.1.2 Social Media Channels

In the digital era, the pervasive impact of social media channels on our daily lives extends to travel decisions. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others have become essential tools for individuals seeking information about potential travel destinations. The widespread presence of social media channels has transformed the way people gather information and make decisions, including in the tourism sector. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2018) assert that these platforms serve as virtual hubs where users actively seek, share, and contribute to the collective narrative of destinations, influencing perceptions and choices significantly. In an era where user-generated content is abundant, the impact of social media on behavioural intention in destination choices becomes a critical area of exploration (Wang et al., 2020).

Many studies have delved into how social media channels, through their visual appeal, user-generated content, and interactive features, not only provide information but actively shape the way individuals perceive and intend to engage with potential travel destinations (Rizky, 2017; Liu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2022). Thus, to understand the intricate dynamics of modern consumer behaviour in the context of travel, where virtual experiences on social media channels are said to play a central role in influencing real-world decisions. The following hypotheses is thus proposed:

H2: The Social Media Channels significantly influence the tourist's behavioural intention.

2.1.3. Social Media Tourism Information Search

In the contemporary landscape of travel, the fusion of social media and tourism information search has become a transformative force, fundamentally altering the way individuals plan and choose their destinations (Dedeoğlu et al., 2020; Odhiambo, 2018). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TripAdvisor are no longer just avenues for social interaction but have evolved into crucial tools for the purpose of collecting information and making decisions in the field of tourism (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2018). The social media tourism information search impacts behavioural intentions, illuminating how these platforms influence the way people conceptualize, evaluate, and ultimately decide on their travel destinations (Odhiambo, 2018).

The advent of social media has redefined the procedure of data search in the tourism domain. Users now turn to these platforms not only for inspiration but as dynamic repositories of firsthand experiences, recommendations, and vivid visual content. Litvin et al., (2018) emphasize that social media platforms serve as influential spaces where individuals actively seek and contribute to the collective narrative of destinations. Social media tourism information search, with its user-generated content, real-time updates, and interactive features, significantly shapes the way individuals conceptualize and evaluate potential travel destinations (Rizky, 2017)

In this digital era, the impact of these platforms on behavioural intentions related to travel choices has become a critical avenue for exploration. Sigala (2018) revealed the theoretical and practical aspects of information search on social channels in tourism, travel, and hospitality, providing insights into how these platforms influence decision-making processes. To grasp the intricacies of modern travelers' information search for decision-making, where virtual experiences curated and shared on social media significantly influence real-world behavioral intentions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Social Media Tourism Information Search significantly influences the tourist's behavioral intention.

2.1.4. Behavioural Intention and Use Behaviour of the Tourist

Individuals belonging to the millennial generation and youthful adults are recognized as initial adopters of technology and innovation (Rogers, 2010). Behavioural intention refers to the degree to which an individual consciously plans to engage in or avoid a specific future behaviour, driven by the appeal and straightforwardness associated with a new technology or invention (Warshaw, 1985). Prior research indicated that people's behavioural intentions, such as their intentions to buy and return, have always been influenced by information communicated by others, whether through in-person or online channels. Actual behaviour, on the other hand, represents the resulting actions triggered by behavioural intention (Norman, P., 1995).

Behavioural intention signifies an individual's inclination and plan to undertake a specific action, such as touring a destination. It's shaped by factors like attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control. Yet, actual Behaviour may deviate due to situational constraints. Grasping this variance is pivotal for tourism stakeholders (Venkatesh, 2010). Notable frameworks like Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (1991) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) provide insights. By harmonizing intentions with Behaviour via strategic interventions, destinations can enrich visitor experiences and cultivate sustainable tourism growth (Wang et al., 2022). Thus, to understand the influence of behavioural intentions on the actual behaviour of the tourist, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: The behavioural Intention of the tourists significantly affect the use behaviour of the tourist.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Drawing from an in-depth review of the literature, the ensuing conceptual framework is suggested for the study. Within this conceptual framework, three distinct variables—Social Media Tourism Promotion, (SMTP), Social Media Channels, (SMC) and Social Media Tourism (SMT) Information Search—are recognized as crucial aspects that impact tourists' behavioural intention and use behaviour. The SMTP variable refers to the promotional activities carried out by tourism entities on social media platforms with the aim of attracting tourists. It encompasses tasks such as publishing material, managing advertisements, and initiating campaigns to promote tourist attractions and events. The efficacy of these promotional endeavors can impact traveler’s views and decision-making in relation to travel options (Fotis, 2015).The term Social Media Channels refer

to the different social media channels that travelers use to interact with travel-related material. Every platform has unique features and content formats that might influence the preferences and level of interaction of travellers (Hoffman et al. 2013). The selection of a social media platform can impact the nature and scope of information that tourists can access, thereby influencing their subsequent behavioural intentions and actions.

The "Social Media Tourism Information Search" variable refers to the active seeking of travel-related information by tourists on social media platforms. The process is actively searching for destination evaluations, recommendations, travel advice, and user-generated information to make informed travel decisions. Social media data significantly influences travelers' views, preferences, and attitudes towards places and travel experiences (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan, 2018).

The Behavioural Intention variable represents the cognitive processes and intents of visitors in relation to travel-related actions. It includes their drive and preparedness to participate in activities such as visiting places, reserving lodgings, or taking part in excursions and activities. Social media promotion, social media channels and search activities have a significant impact on behavioural intention (BI).

The use behaviour variable measures the extent to which travellers actively engage and interact with tourism products and services following their exposure to social media material. It includes actions like reserving flights, lodging, tours, and activities, as well as exchanging experiences and evaluations on social media sites. Thus overall, the following framework is proposed for the study.

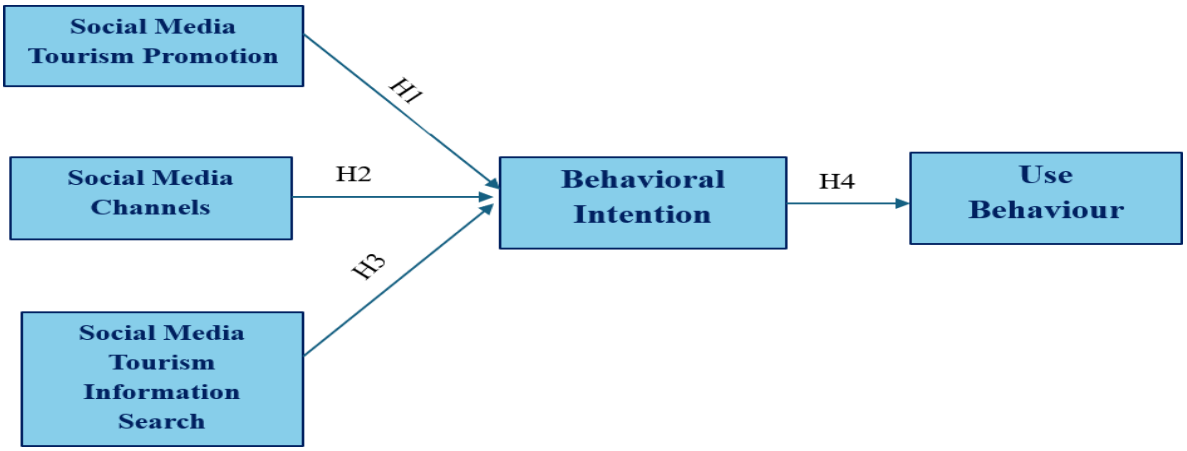

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author developed)

3. Research Gap

a. Platform Preferences: While social media usage in India is widespread, there might be a gap in understanding which specific platforms have the most significant influence on tourism-related decisions (Nisar et al, 2020).

b. Influence of User-Generated Content: User-generated content (UGC) on social media platforms, such as reviews, photos, and videos, can significantly influence consumer choices. There may be a gap in understanding the impact of UGC, specifically within the context of Indian tourism (Liu et al.,2017).

c. Impact of Social Media Influencers: Social media influencers wield substantial influence in molding travel trends and consumer decisions. Nonetheless, there may be a deficiency in grasping the efficacy of influencer marketing strategies (Kumar & Abraham, 2014). Further research could delve into the effects of influencer partnerships on brand perception, destination preferences, and travel behaviors among Indian consumers.

d. Cross-Cultural Perspectives: India is a culturally diverse country with a wide range of linguistic, ethnic, and regional differences. Research could investigate how cultural factors influence the use of social media in travel management across different regions and demographic groups within India. It could also focus on identifying the platforms most used by Indian travellers for trip inspiration, planning, and booking (Venkatesh & Suresh, 2016). Exploring how Indian travellers perceive and interact with UGC could provide valuable insights (Manhas, & Dogra, 2019).

4. Problem Statement

The tourism industry has witnessed a profound transformation due to the advent and widespread adoption of social media platforms. These platforms have become pivotal in influencing consumer behavior, especially in how potential travellers gather information, form perceptions, and make decisions regarding their travel plans. Despite the clear impact of social media, there exists a substantial gap in comprehensively understanding the intricacies of this influence. Specifically, the ways in which social media content—such as user-generated reviews, influencer endorsements, and real-time interactions—shapes consumer trust, preferences, and, ultimately, their travel-related decisions are not sufficiently explored (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Furthermore, the tourism sector encounters hurdles in fully leveraging the capabilities of social media to engage and retain consumers. The fluid and swiftly changing landscape of social media platforms demands that businesses consistently adjust their approaches to remain pertinent and competitive. Nevertheless, numerous tourism enterprises lack the understanding and resources necessary to deploy proficient social media marketing strategies that resonate with their intended audiences. This deficiency frequently leads to overlooked chances for cultivating brand loyalty and stimulating expansion (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

Addressing these gaps is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, understanding the specific mechanisms of social media influence can help tourism businesses develop more targeted and impactful marketing strategies. Secondly, it can enhance consumer engagement by leveraging social media's interactive capabilities, thus fostering a more personalized and satisfying customer experience. Ultimately, the findings from this research can enrich the wider domain of digital marketing and consumer psychology by shedding light on the significance of social media in modern consumer behavior.

5. Research Objectives

This study aims to explore how social media influences consumer behavior within the Indian tourism industry. The study engages in a cross-sectional, quantitative research design. This design will allow for the examination of the relationship's key variables such as Social Media Tourism promotion, Social Media Channels, Social Media Tourism Information Search, Behavioural Intentions and Use Behaviour of the tourist and their influence on each other.

1. To study the effect and influence of social media tourism promotion on the Behavioural intention of the Indian tourists.
2. To analyze the effect and influence of different social media channels on the Behavioural intention of the Indian tourists.
3. To examine the effect and influence of social media usage for information search on the Behavioural intention of Indian tourists.
4. To evaluate the effect and impact of Behavioural intentions on the actual behaviour of Indian tourists.

6. Research Methodology

This study shall employ a robust research methodology that will consist of collection of primary data and its analysis to achieve the objectives of the study.

Primary data will be gathered through a structured survey questionnaire, meticulously designed and validated, encompassing items derived from pertinent variables identified in the literature. The target respondents are individuals who have traveled in the past year and used social media to choose their travel destinations.

Given that the population size is unknown, a minimum sample size of 400 respondents has been determined using Cochran's formula, ensuring a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 0.05, thereby providing a reliable basis for the study and is considered adequate for the study (Cochran, 1977). The sample will be selected through a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness.

Data analysis will involve various statistical methods, including multiple regression and correlation, to uncover relationships and draw meaningful conclusions. Furthermore, structural equation modeling, optimized using Amos 23, will be employed for advanced data modeling, enhancing the depth and rigor of the analysis.

This methodological approach aims to generate specific insights that correspond with the research objectives, facilitating a thorough comprehension of how social media impacts decisions regarding tourist destinations.

7. Expected Outcomes of the Research

This research is anticipated to yield several significant insights into the impact of social media on consumer behavior within the Indian tourism industry.

Firstly, the study is expected to identify the key social media platforms and types of content—such as reviews, photos, and videos—that most significantly influence consumers' travel decisions. This includes understanding the role these platforms play at various stages of travel planning, from initial inspiration to the final booking.

Additionally, the research aims to provide a detailed analysis of the behavior patterns of Indian tourists, particularly focusing on how they engage with social media before, during, and after their travels.

This comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior will offer valuable information for tourism stakeholders, enabling them to craft more effective marketing strategies and improve engagement with potential travellers through social media channels. The Indian

hospitality and tourism sector, can thus carefully consider and leverage social media to sustain and enhance their tourism enterprises. They can understand how to stay current by providing pertinent information and actively engaging with the tourists in their information search phase. This should help them in securing a competitive edge in the business landscape.

Overall, the study aims to enhance the existing body of knowledge by clarifying the dynamic relationship between social media usage and consumer behavior within the context of Indian tourism.

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